

MARTYRDOM

A poem written following the announcement of Ibrahim Afa's death.

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In the dreamy hours
Of the Opening Night
The rote incantation
Of ritual matters
Was set aside.
 The news was broken.

Did I hear it right?
It was drowned in
The burst of gun fire
Re-ver-berating in
the stillness of the night,
the "funeral dirge"
of the freedom fighter.

The news was broken,
the Congress shaken

Ibrahim is gone!
Ibrahim Afa,
the name that struck
their stony heart
like a burning arrow,
 is now just a memory

Ibrahim is gone
we were suddenly told,
and I turned to you,
bereaved companions,
for the salient emotion,
of homage in grief
and lachrymal commotion.
But I saw instead
 Steely.... Stoic.... silence
born of sacrifice,
which has taken so much
we have ceased to mourn

or count our losses.

Ibrahim is gone.
and his martyrdom
stirs in me a storm
of painful memories;
 familiar faces flash
 back and forth
 in the film of my mind.

Ibrahim, you're gone
and softly, softly
do we weep for you;
 softly, so as not
 to hear our cries
 and expose ourselves.
'Tis a martial custom
sanctioned by necessity.

The torrential tears
contained in this ink
flow from the spring
of repressed sorrow.
 But the ink will dry
 and the tears give way
 to a joyful tomorrow.

Ibrahim, you're gone
and yet you are here,
you and the rest
of our "living dead."
 Our martyrs live;
 we see them, hear them,
 touch them daily
as we tend our
flowers of freedom
and the growing Tree
of Liberty,
 nurtured
 by their
 precious blood.

(First published, March 1987, this poem was dedicated to Ibrahim's widow, Nura Mohamed and their daughter, Sara Ibrahim).